

On March 27, 1998, an agreement was signed forming a unique new partnership dedicated to helping communities throughout the state of Washington improve their physical and cultural environments.



The RTCA program, a technical assistance program of the National Park Service, is committed to helping build community-driven partnerships that conserve natural and cultural resources and provide recreational opportunities at the local level.

The mission of the American Society of Landscape Architects is to lead, to educate and to participate in the careful stewardship, wise planning and artful design of our cultural and natural environments. Landscape architects strive to realize a balance among preservation, use and management of the country's resources.

The first RTCA/WASLA partnership project came together in Seattle's International District neighborhood in 1998, and both organizations look forward to working with many other Washington communities — east and west, urban, suburban and rural — in the coming years.

Rivers, Trails and
Conservation Assistance
National Park Service
909 First Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104
(206) 220-4113

Washington Chapter
American Society of
Landscape Architects
1916 Pike Place #1250
Seattle, WA 98101-1097
(206) 443-9484



Neighborhoods, small towns, and community and regional groups sometimes face planning or design challenges that they are unable to meet due to a lack of expertise, direction, funding, or other resources. This new venture between the National Washington Chapter of the American Architects gives communities a pairing of RTCA's organizational resources and skills of WASLA's landscape architecture.



A charette is generally an intensive, “illustrated brainstorming session” involving any number of people and lasting from a few hours to a few days. It is a tradition dating from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris (in the early 20th Century),



where professors would send a cart (*charrette*) around to pick up students' work at the submission deadline. Some students, frantic to complete their drawings, would jump onto the cart as it rolled down the street, hence, working "*en charrette*."

The ideas generated during a charette are often presented back to the community in a public forum of some kind. No idea is discarded due to impracticality or disputable details — these decisions are for the community to make later, after the dust of the event has settled.

The next page illustrates how the RTCA/WASLA charette process worked for one Washington community...

PICTURE I.D.: A COMMUNITY DESIGN EVENT - SEATTLE WASHINGTON



"Picture I.D.: A Community Design Event" was the first project in the new collaboration between RTCA and WASLA, a charette to lend the skills of volunteer landscape architects and other professionals to the strategic planning efforts of the International District (ID) neighborhood, the cultural and business center for many of the Puget Sound region's Asian-Pacific American communities.

The ID lies just southeast of downtown Seattle and is characterized by a sizeable elderly population, significant low-income households, affordable housing units, small businesses and several community development organizations. The neighborhood faces many acute planning challenges, being surrounded by commercial and industrial areas, bisected by Interstate 5 and, more imminently, dealing with the current and future construction of two new professional sports stadiums literally across the street.

In developing the "Chinatown/International District Strategic Plan" beginning in the Fall of 1997, InterIm Community Development Association (ICDA), a planning and advocacy organization for the ID, requested technical assistance from RTCA for greenspace planning. As the project evolved, RTCA invited WASLA to help plan and stage a design charette and recruit volunteers from among its membership. Architects, planners, engineers and community representatives who lived or worked in the ID — or had some other interest in the neighborhood — rounded out the design teams, which totaled approximately 35 people.



"The team effort was very present from the outset, which was a wonderful experience. Sometimes, groups of people with diverse backgrounds find it difficult to form a consensus, but this process worked well... everyone seemed to come together and see the whole picture toward the end..."

— M. Jim Yamaguchi, ASLA, Volunteer Team Member

RESULTS

According to the ICDA, drawings, maps and ideas produced in the "Picture I.D." charette became invaluable visual aids for the International District's Neighborhood Strategic Plan meetings held through the summer of 1998. Rather than merely discussing an abstract idea such as "a trolley line running up King Street" or "a combination retail/parking development," multi-lingual residents could actually see how such a proposal might look in a particular setting before debating its feasibility.

With the feedback from these meetings, the ICDA refined the Neighborhood Strategic Plan and included many of the charette drawings for presentation to the Seattle City Council in October 1998. The plan's introduction read: "We hope this plan can serve as a tool to help the community take action with the City and other partners to carry out the needed changes to sustain the Chinatown/International District as a truly livable community."

The community continues to build on the charette ideas as it generates a community action plan, prioritizes local projects, and works for on-the-ground results.



The Danny Woo International District Community Garden

A Friday night dinner launched the "Picture I.D." weekend, introducing team members and community leaders to one another, and featuring the signing of an agreement formalizing the RTCA/WASLA partnership. On Saturday morning, team members were led on an informative and entertaining two-hour walking tour of the neighborhood by "Uncle Bob" Santos, regional Housing and Urban Development representative and long-time local advocate. The four teams then went to work in the airy penthouse meeting rooms provided by the Turner Construction Company, a local business.

The rest of Saturday Morning and early afternoon involved discussions (sometimes debates) among team members, with designers tossing around ideas and community members adding local and historical views. The four teams were originally assigned to look at specific areas, such as pedestrian amenities, housing, storefront aesthetics, transportation corridors, etc. But by the time the sketching began, many had shifted their focus — based on new priorities that emerged from the earlier discussions — and even joined forces with other teams to co-produce ideas, maps, perspective sketches and lists of recommendations.

Fragments of teams worked into Saturday evening and showed up Sunday morning to produce last-minute drawings and polish their presentations for the Sunday afternoon open house. There, the four team captains presented their proposals to curious neighbors and elected officials. Questions were thoughtful and concerned and many were impressed that so many ideas and drawings had been produced in such a short time.

"(The charette) gave us the opportunity to sit down with urban planners, architects and community folks to really visualize the future... to paint a picture of how the International District can look, literally as well as conceptually..."

— B.J. Santos, InterIm Community Development Association

